

ESSAY ON EPIGRAM.

THE word Epigram is sometimes translated “Inscription;” but possibly it is better to use the original word itself, as “*inscription*” only describes what the epigram was in its origin, and refers to the source from which all epigrammatic poetry has been derived.

When Theseus erected a pillar on the Isthmus of Corinth, and wrote on the one side of it, “Here is not Peloponnesus, but Attica;” and on the other, “Here is Peloponnesus, and not Attica,” these words were the epigram, or inscription, on the pillar. How different, however, is such an epigram from those which we read in Martial. How little does such an inscription appear to possess in common with the epigram as at present considered.

Is there no reason for the gradual transformation of a simple intimation into a play of wit; or is the cause not worth an investigation?

Vavassor declares for the affirmative in both instances, (*De Epigrammata*, cap. 3.) “*Frustra videntur scriptores hujus artis fuisse, qui nos illud primum admonitos esse voluerunt epigrammata atque inscriptionem unum sonare.—Facile intelligimus mansisse vocem, mutato significationem; et potestate vocis.*”

It appears useless to him to commence a treatise on epigram with the original meaning of the word, it being evident to every one, that its present signification is very different. We retain the word, but have changed its meaning.

In the mean time, it is no less certain, that the employment of a particular word in a language is seldom without a direct motive, and that a thing which retains a certain name, will generally preserve some identity with that for which the term was originally invented.

What is the analogy in the present instance? What share of identity has the most witty epigram of Martial with a simple inscription on an old monument, so that both should be known by the same name, among a people who, more than any other, have not allowed their language to become the sport of accident?

This question is not the same as that asked by Scaliger, in the commencement of his chapter on epigrams : “Quam ob causam Epigrammatis vox brevibus tantum poematiis propria facta est? An propter ipsam brevitatem, quasi nihil esset preter ipsam inscriptionem? An quæ statuis trophæis, imaginibus, pro elegiis inscribebantur ea primo veroque significatu Epigrammata sunt appellata?” (*Poetices*, lib. iii. cap. 126.) Scaliger asks, “why small poems only are called epigrams?” This is implying that all small poems, without distinction, are so called, and not a certain class alone; and I am therefore not satisfied with the answer of Scaliger. “Perhaps,” he says, “because they are so small, as to be little beyond a mere inscription; or, possibly, because very small poems only were engraved on monuments, amounting, strictly speaking, to inscriptions.” This, as before observed, is assuming a fact, and rendering explanation superfluous; for if it be true, that brevity by itself constitutes an epigram, the sarcastic notion of that Spaniard must be correct, who exclaimed, “An epigram! who is so stupid as not to be able to make an epigram; or such a fool as to make more than one?”

This therefore asserts nothing more than was assumed by me at the beginning of this inquiry—that the small poems originally engraved on

monuments were called epigrams; which supplies no reason for giving the same name, at present, to small poems, which are neither fit, nor intended, to be inscribed on monuments.

I do not find that the modern writers on epigram have troubled themselves with this inquiry; at least Mr. Boileau has not, who in his *Art. Poetiq.* Chant. ii. v. 103, observes, that an epigram is nothing else than a piece of wit, pointed and ornamented by a brace of rhymes. Neither has Mr. Batteux taken it into consideration, who defines an epigram to be an interesting thought, pointedly delivered in a few words. In neither the one nor the other of these definitions can I discover why an ably versified piece of wit, or a briefly delivered interesting thought, is to be called an inscription or an epigram, unless I am to content myself by concluding, that any thought, briefly and ably expressed, deserves a place on a monument if it merits one anywhere else. It certainly is not the matter which justifies the name of epigram, as now applied, as it has long escaped confinement to the limits which are adapted to denote the origin and purpose of a monument; and, at present, little more is required to extend it to any thing which may become a subject of human curiosity. It is in the form, therefore, that we must look for an answer to our

inquiry. It must be found in the parts, in the number and arrangement of these parts, and in the impression which a peculiar arrangement of parts infallibly produces. In these we must trace the cause why an epigram may still be called an inscription, although very seldom used as such.

An inscription cannot be imagined without reference to the place, or thing, on which it is or at least can be inscribed; both together producing that impression which we usually attribute to the inscription alone—the material object excites our curiosity, and the inscription allays it. To whom, in the same manner, is it not obvious, that when they think of epigrams, whatever their number and variety, they regard each of them as containing the principal parts that are perfectly distinct from each other; one of which excites attention or curiosity, which it is the province of the other to gratify? On this simple circumstance will I venture to ground the whole explanation of epigrams; and, in the sequel, endeavour to ascertain whether, according to the explanation, the epigram is not distinguishable from all other small poems; and whether all the qualities required by taste and criticism in an epigram, are not included in such explanation.

I repeat, therefore, that the epigram is a poem, in which, in the manner of an inscription, our

attention and curiosity are excited by some individual object, in respect to which we are more or less kept in suspense, in order to be the more piquantly gratified at the close.

When I say, "in the manner of an inscription," I include a consideration of the monument also, which corresponds with the first part of the epigram, as already mentioned, and I consider it necessary to repeat this observation before I proceed to develop and apply my explanation any further.

These two leading parts of an epigram, which I deem essential to its nature, have not been unobserved by all the writers on epigram; but the whole of them have neglected to trace this division to its origin, and have made no adequate use of their discovery. It only led Scaliger to adopt a twofold species of epigram. "*Epigrammata igitur est poema breve, cum simplici cujuspiam rei, vel personæ, vel facti indicatione: aut ex propositis aliquid ducens, quæ definitio simul complectitur etiam divisionem ne quis damnet prolixitatem.*" Because, in an inscription, he saw nothing beyond a simple notice of a person or an event, Scaliger deemed an epigram, in which there is a deduction from certain premises, and in which two distinct parts are perceptible, as something different from an inscription. The more refined perception, that the monument, contributed its

share to the inscription, did not occur to him ; nor did he discover, that it represented that part in the epigram which excites attention, while the inscription itself answers to the other part which supplies the gratification of the excited curiosity. The copious Vavassor has also written a long chapter on the two parts of an epigram, which he calls the *explanation* and *conclusion*, in regard to which, he makes several useful observations. “Sunt igitur partes epigrammatis duæ numero dunataxat, insignes ac primariae, expositio rei et conclusio epigrammatis. In illo genere primo quod statuimus simplicis, et unius modi epigrammatis.”

(Vide cap. 13. de partibus *Epigrammatiſiſ*.)

Mr. Batteux also expressly says, that “the epigram must have two parts ; the first of which must contain the introduction of the subject, and that which has produced the thought ; and the second, the thought itself, which forms the point, or that by which the reader is interested.” Notwithstanding this definition, the writer in question allows certain epigrams a place among his examples which have not all these parts, as, for instance :

Grandeur, savoir, renommé,

Amitié, plaisir, et bien,

Tout n'est que vent que fumée

Peut mieux dire tout n'est rien.

Friendship, pleasure, wealth, and fame;

Wit, and power, and noble name,

Are but mere bubbles, light and small,—

Smoke, wind, or rather nought at all.

Whatever thought these lines may contain, the origin of such thought is wanting. Where is the fact leading to the thought, on the part of the poet, and by which he conducts his readers to it also? The thought, or concluding part, is alone discoverable; and if, as this writer agrees, the epigram possesses two parts, then are these lines, and many more of the same sort, not epigrams.

Unfortunately, this is not a single unlucky instance, but it serves to show the faultiness of the explanation, according to which the epigram has to contain an interesting thought, delivered with brief felicity; for if it be possible to deliver a thought without advertence to the cause of it, as in the foregoing example, then will it want the proper parts of an epigram, and not be reducible to the definition even of the author himself who supplies it.

When we suddenly perceive a stately monument, mixed with the surprise caused by the beauty and grandeur of the structure, a species of anxiety arises to become acquainted with the purport of it, which lasts until we approach close enough to read the inscription, when a third pleasant feeling

is produced by the gratification of our curiosity. Such a series of impressions it is the object of the epigram to imitate ; and only in consequence of this imitation has it retained the name of epigram. In what manner, however, is the epigram to produce the impressions produced by the inscription, but by the adoption of the same form and order ? It must excite us to look for a single object, the foundation of which it endeavours to lay down with all possible clearness, and then satisfies our expectation in an unexpected manner. The two parts of an epigram may, therefore, most properly be called,—the first, that of *Expectation*,—the second, that of *Explanation* ; and I will proceed to look for them among some smaller poems, in order to discover the classification to which they belong. Naturally, there can be only two sorts of uncongenial epigrams, the one of which excites expectation without affording an explanation, while the other supplies explanation without having previously excited expectation.

I shall begin with the latter class, to which all those small poems in particular belong, which contain nothing beyond moral instruction or reflective observation. Such instruction, or observation, if it is deduced from some individual case, or is rendered applicable to something which has excited our curiosity, is very fit for the second part

of an epigram; but, considered in itself, however wittily it be delivered, and however pointed in its conclusion, still it is no epigram, but simply a maxim, which, although excitable of admiration, cannot produce the series of impressions which are essential to the epigram. When Martial addresses the following to Decianus, (vide lib. i. ep. 9.)

Quod magni Thraseæ consummatique Catonis.

Dogmata sic sequeris, salvus ut esse velis:

Pectore nèc nudo strictos incurris in enses

Quod fecisse velim te, Deciane facis.

Noli virum facili redimit qui sanguine famam

Hunc vob, laudari qui sine morte potest.

Consummate Cato's and great Thrasia's strain,

As far as prudence goes, thou dost maintain,

And not thy breast on naked swords dost run;

What men judge best, that, Decian, hast thou done,

He's not approv'd who cheaply dies for fame,

But without death who gets a glorious name?

What do the last two lines in the original wait to be called an interesting thought? and could the latter be more shortly and happily expressed? Would they, however, possess the same merit if taken separately; as they exhibit in connection with the preceding ones? Will they, as a maxim simply, possess the same attraction, and produce the same impressions as they do now, when applied

to an individual case, which latter imparts to the former as much forcible conviction, as it receives from its beauty of illustration in return? Or suppose our Wernich, in order to recommend parsimony, had written :

Love gold, but first thy doubting soul assure
'Tis poverty thou fliest, and not the poor.

The thought would have been interesting, if briefly and happily delivered; but would it not be still more so, if thus conveyed to the parsimonious Calidon?

Love gold no doubt thou dost, but then we're sure
'Tis poverty thou fliest, and not the poor!

The difference is trifling, yet the former is, after all, nothing but a general precept; while the latter is a moving picture, full of life and animation—the former a maxim in verse, the latter an epigram. Nevertheless, both Mr. Wernich and Mr. Logan abound in misnamed inscriptions, which contain nothing more than general sentences; and although they are, and especially Wernich, inexhaustible in their excellencies, and dress out a simple moral axiom so as to resemble an epigram exceedingly, yet they will seldom deceive a fine taste, so as to altogether conceal the distinction. On the contrary, after reading

through a great number of these books, the man of taste will deem himself in company, at one and the same time, with a man of the world and a pedant; the first of whom talks of matters of experience, which lead to certain general truths, while the latter expatiates in sentences to which individual cases are yet to be applied. With no epigrammatist have I been more tired in this way than by Mr. Owen, in whom the pedant, who lashes himself into wit, is heard more frequently than the man of experience. That man must possess a strong head, who can read a whole volume of Mr. Owen at one time, without growing giddy. I always become so, and I account for it by the perusal of so many general conceptions, having no connection with each other, and which succeed one another without pause. The imagination endeavours to produce out of each of these an individual image or impression, and sinks under the effort.

To moralize forms no part of the object of MARTIAL, although most of his subjects are moral ones. I know of no Latin poet from whom fewer moral sentences can be taken. He has only a few epigrams, which, like that to Decianus, conclude with a general moral. His moral, in fact, is entirely interwoven with his subject, and he moralizes more by examples than

by words. The thirteenth epigram in his twelfth book, indeed, is as follows :

TO AN AUCTOR. AD AUCTUM.

Genus, Aucte, lucri divites habent iram

Odisse quam donasse vilius constat.

This amounts to nothing beyond a fine observation, with an entire silence in regard to the occurrence which led to it : but of this sort there are not more than three or four in the whole of his epigrams ; and even in these it seems as if he, for certain reasons, left out the occasion, rather than that he had none. Auctus might be acquainted with some rich man, who artfully contrived a quarrel with himself, or the poet, in order to spare the necessity of a gift, which might, otherwise, have been expected. At least, Martial always addresses similar moral sentences to some particular person ; which apparent trifles Wernich and Logan should not have overlooked, for by attending to it they would certainly have enlivened their own observations. Although we neither know the persons addressed nor the precise reasons why they in particular are addressed, yet the mere selection of an individual puts us more on the alert, in order to discover, if within our own circle some one may not exist to whom the notion of the poet may be applied. If merely

general moral sentences are delivered, whether with the simplicity of a Cato, the subtility of a Baudius, or the acuteness of a Wernich, they will never produce the effect which can alone entitle them to the name of epigrams. If therefore a Verinus, a Pibrack, or whatever else these honest men may be called, who have written sage and edifying distiches, are to be excluded from the roll of epigrammatists, those will be no less so, who have endeavoured to bring still more scientific truths within the limits of epigram. The verses of such may assist the memory, but they are certainly not epigrams, although, according to the definition of Mr. Batteux, it is difficult to refuse them the name. The medical prescriptions of the school of Salerno are very interesting ; might they not be delivered with the graceful precision in which they are so much deficient ? Yet, if even Lukrez himself were to undertake the task, it would only supply an additional proof that the definition of Mr. Batteux is too wide, and that it leaves out the mark which most essentially distinguishes the epigrams from all other small poems.

The second uncongenial sort of epigram, is that which excites expectation, without any explanation to answer it. Such are all the small poems which narrate a fact, without determining

the point of view from which it is to be considered, and therefore only inform us, that something has occurred that does not happen every day. To these may be added the small pieces which, like the “Emperors” of Ausonius, briefly comprehend the whole history and character of some person ; of which sort so many have been produced under the titles of *Icones*, *Heroes*, &c. &c. These cannot be called epigrams, if only from their want of unity, which consists not in the identity of person, but of action. But even when they contain a single and complete action, they are not epigrams, if we are led into no conclusion. If, for instance, Martial had satisfied himself by including the history of *Mutius Scævola* in the following four verses :

Dum peteret regem decepta satellite dextra,
Injecit sacris se peritura focis
Sed tam sæva pius miracula non tulit hostis,
Et raptum flammis jussit abire virum.

Could we have then said that he had made an epigram ? It would scarcely have been one had he added :

Urere quam potuit contempto Mucius igne.
Hanc spectare manum Porsenna non potuit.

for even this is nothing more than history ; it is rendered an epigram only by the concluding lines :

Major deceptæ fama est, et gloria dextræ ;
Si non errasset fecerat, illa minus.

For not until then do we perceive that the poet occupied our attention with the historical fact, in order to introduce and establish the fine observation, that a lucky failure will often effect the attainment of our purpose sooner than the best concerted plan. This inference, together with the pleasure afforded by the individual case from which it is deduced, forms the total interest of the above epigram.

We must undoubtedly be satisfied with only a part of this pleasure, in several pieces in the Græcian Anthology, and still more in those of certain moderns, who have fancied that it was only necessary to versify some old story in order to make an epigram. From the Anthology the following instance may be quoted :

Κοινὴ παρ κλιστῇ ληθαργίκος ἡδε φρενοπλῆξ
Κειμενοί, ἀλληλων νεσού ἀπεσκεδασαν.
Εξεθορε κλινῆς γαρ δ τολμηεις ὑπὸ λυσσῆς,
Και τον ἀναισθῆτον πάντος ἐτυπτε μενεες.
Πληγαὶ δὲ αμφοτέροις ἔγενοντ' ἄκος· αἰσ ο μεν
δατον
Εγγένειο, τον δὲ ντυνε πελνες ἐριψε κοπος.

"A madman and a lethargic person occupy the same bed, and the one became the physician of the other; for the first, in his frenzy, beat the second out of his drowsiness, and rendered himself sleepy by the operation." This is humorous, but nothing more. It by no means follows that both were cured, as the tendency to the sleep in the one was not removed, nor would sleep ensure the sanity of the other when he woke again. But even supposing the contrary, we are only where we were; for the pleasure produced by a story which conveys nothing valuable, and which will only prompt a smile, is very slightly to be estimated. I trust that I shall not be reproached here with a deficiency of taste for Grecian simplicity; for my objection is not that it too barely supplies its component parts, but that it wants some which are essential altogether. It is not the pointed conclusion which I miss here, but the general one for which the mere termination of the fact furnishes no substitute. For the same reason, I confess that I regard another very celebrated epigram as a mere fragment: I mean that on an Hermaphrodite:

Quum mea me genitrix grava gestaret in alvo,
Quid pareret, fertur consuluisse deos.

Mars est, Phœbus ait: Mars, femina: Junoque neutrum.
Quumque forem natus, Hermaphroditus eram.

Quarenti letum? Dea sic ait; occidet armis:
 Mars cruce: Phœbus aquis. Sors rata quæqua fuit
 Arbor obumbrat aquas: adscendo, decidit ensis,
 Quem tuleram, casu labor et ipse super;
 Pes hæsit ramis, caput incidit omne: tulique
 Femina, vir, neutrum, flumina, tela crucem.

THE HERMAPHRODITE.

While erst imprison'd in the womb I lay,
 To learn my sex ere yet I saw the day,
 Oft would my mother to the shrines repair,
 And pour to various gods her anxious prayer.
 "The child shall prove a male," Apollo cried;
 "A female," the stern God of War replied;
 "Nor male nor female," Jove's imperial Bride.
 And soon, to prove these strange predictions right,
 Myself appear'd, a young Hermaphrodite.
 "How will it die?" became my mother's word,
 And Juno's dread reply was, "By the sword;"
 "It will be hang'd," said Mars; quoth Phœbus, "Drown'd;"
 And each response again correct was found:
 For climbing once a tree, whose leafy brow
 Flung its broad shadow o'er the lake below,
 I slipt, my rapier from the scabbard flew,
 And, as I fell, transfix'd my body through;
 Caught by the leg, awhile in air I swung,
 My head beneath the watery surface hung.
 Male, female, both, yet neither, thus I died,
 By hanging, by the sword, and by the tide.

The invention of this small poem is so ingenious, the expression so accurate, and yet so

elegant, learned critics cannot persuade themselves that it is a modern production ; for although M. de la Monnoye thinks he has proved that Pulex, to whom the manuscript assigns it, was not an ancient, but an author of the fifteenth century, this opinion is contrary to those of Politian, Scaliger, and many other writers. Mr Burman, junior, is inclined to think that this Pulex might himself have copied it from some ancient, as he is not known to have written any other poem. With all this, however, I have nothing to do ; whether ancient or modern, I cannot call this little poem an excellent epigram. There is no implied truth in it ; I cannot decide whether it is intended to praise or to blame the providence of the gods. Ought we to wonder, that among so many gods, all knew so much about the future, or that they did not know a great deal more ? Are we to conclude, that they would not reply more explicitly, or that they could not ; and that a fourth and still higher power so managed, that none of them should be compromised ? If the gods are introduced only as guessers, I exceedingly prefer the story of the Wine-tasters, in *Don Quixote* ; and notwithstanding the beauty of the verse, would rather have invented the latter than the former. The counterpart of stories, unqualified for the deduction of

any moral, are those in which the moral is so obvious, that it is superfluous to add it in express terms; an instance of which is to be found in the Grecian Anthology, in the story of the Lame and the Blind:

'Αυτερα τις λιπιγυιον υπερ νωτοιο λιπαινυται

'Ηγε ποδας χρησας, διματα χρησαμενος.

A lame man on a blind man's shoulders begs:
Does he lend eyes or does he borrow legs?

Or still more literally:

Thus he at once lends eyes and borrows legs.

Who is so short-sighted as not instantly to perceive the great truth deducible from this narrative? And if so, is not a narrative which discloses so noble a truth in so elegant a manner, to be deemed an epigram? This does not follow; for why should it be called an epigram, when it is entitled to a more honourable appellation? In fact, it is an *apologue*, or true *Esopic fable*; for the brevity with which it is delivered by no means alters its nature, but, on the contrary, shows the manner in which the Grecians chose to deliver such fables. Besides the preceding, there are more of the same sort, to which there is nothing which bears a resemblance in the *Esopic collec-*

tion, but which deserves to be attached to it. Mr. Gellert was, therefore, very right in taking the blind and the lame for the subject of a fable, but he extended it too much, and was not so learned as to be acquainted with its origin.

The essential difference between a fable and an epigram is, that the parts which succeed each other in the epigram, are simultaneous in the fable, and are separable only in the abstract. The individual case in the fable cannot excite expectation, for the conclusion instantly follows. Fable, too, produces only an impression, and is not adapted to produce many in succession; but the epigram either rejects the cases in which the moral is at once conspicuous, or sets the moral aside, and calls attention to another which is equally deducible but less obvious; such being the only way left to renew expectation, when previously anticipated.

However, although expectation without gratification, or even both without a moral, cannot be said to constitute an epigram, yet all those epigrams are not to be rejected, in which the poet is only a narrator; for real occurrences still remain, which contain the succession of an epigram, or in which such succession can be formed by a slight declension. Thus, the heroic manner in which Arria in death preceded her husband, even in its

simple historical form, our poet Kleist found enough to construct a beautiful epigram. The “Pætus, it is not painful,” bestows a sufficient conclusion. Martial, on the contrary, thought this sublime exclamation required ornament, and without adding it as poet, puts it into the mouth of Arria herself:

Casto suo gladium cuna tradert Arria Pætu,
Quem de visceribus traxerat ipsa suis :
Si qua fides, vulnus ; quod feci, non dolet, inquit :
Sed quod tu facies, hoc mihi Pæte dolet.

When from her breast fair Arria drew the sword,
And held it, reeking, to her much lov'd lord ;
Pætus, she cried, no pain oppresses me ;
My wound is nothing, but I feel for thee.

Without doubt, Martial deemed the *non dolet* too masculine, and rather wished to exhibit the tenderness of the attached wife, than simply a contempt for death. I attempt not to decide which of these epigrams is the best, as I only aim at showing how, by the aid of a little good versification, the inventive genius of the poet may produce a good epigram, without infringing upon historical truth.

But it is not in conformity with my definition alone, that epigrams are to be accurately distin-

guished from other small poems : more general explanations require similar precision ; but, possibly, the attributes which render an epigram perfect, are better deducible from my definition than from any other.

If the first part of an epigram, which I have classed under the head of "Expectation," is to correspond with the monument on which an inscription is engraven, it must be evident that the former will be so much the more perfect, as it accords with a monument which is distinguished for beauty and grandeur. Above all things, however, it must conform to it in unity, so that we may perceive the purport at once, however in the way of description the poet may occasionally extend its limits. It may consist as well in five or six words as in so many lines, as for instance, read the following epigram of Naugirius :

DE PYTHAGORO SIMULCRO.

Quem toties vixisse anima redēunte renatum
 Mutato fama est corpora Pythagoram :
 Cerne, iterum ut docti cœlo generatus Asylæ
 Vivat, ut antiquum servet in ore decus.
 Dignam aliquid certe volvit : sic fronte severa est :
 Sic in se magno pectore totus abit.
 Posset et ille altos animi depromere sensus :
 Sed veteri abstractus religione, silet.

In this epigram, the first six lines calling for

attention are simply a description of the subject; and what is here said in six lines, the Grecian original expresses in a few words. (Vide *Anthologica*, lib. iv. cap. 33.)

Ἄντοι Πυθαγορῆς δὲ ποιητὴς· διὸ μετὰ φωνῆς
Εἶδες ἀν, εἶγε λαλεῖν ἥθελε Πυθαγορῆς.

Faustus Sabæus translates it thus :

Pythagoram pictor poterat finxisse loquentem
Verum Pythagoram conticuisse juvat.

And we may render it in one line :

Why speaks it not? It is Pythagoras.

However, neither Naugirius nor the Grecian seems to exhibit the exact quality which the part of an epigram exciting expectation ought to possess; but another Grecian, who adopted the same thought, has rendered it complete, not like Naugirius with mere expletive, but by a correction of the thought itself. It was impossible to take for granted, with Naugirius and the above recited Greek, that Pythagoras was always silent, although silence was a practical exercise in his school. How much more beautiful, therefore, is the following of Julianus :

Οὐ τού διαττυσσοντα φυσιν πολυμητιν ἀριθμων
 Ἐθελεν ὁ πλαστης Πυθαγορην τελεσαι,
 Αλλα του ἐν σιγῃ πινυτοφρονι και ταχα φωνην
 Ενθην ἀποκρυπτει και τοδ ἔχων ὀκασαι.

Vide *Anthol. I. c.¹¹*

“ This is not Pythagoras explaining the secret nature of numbers, but Pythagoras in the wisdom of his silence.”

The general rule, therefore, to be observed, in reference to the extent of that part which contains the expectation is, that we are not, for the sake of making a few verses more, to expatiate like a schoolboy, but to attend to the solution, and ask ourselves, what is to be gained in clearness and force by the extension of the part preceding ?

There are cases in which every thing depends on this extension ; and to such, in particular, those epigrams belong, in which the conclusion refers to a relative notion ; as, for instance, those in which something is represented as a maximum or a minimum, and where, in consequence, the measure of the said magnitudes must, in the first place be exhibited, and a gradation, either of great or small, be frequently repeated. If Martial had only written the following lines on a small estate presented to him by a friend, it would still have been an epigram :

Donasti, Lupe, rus sub urbe nobis :
 Sed rus est mihi majus in fenestra
 Hoc quo tempore prædium dedisti,
 Mallem te mihi prandium dedisses.

How much more whimsical and pointed, however, is the same epigram rendered by the introduction of still smaller comparative measures and diminutives, than that of a small garden seen from a window. As for instance :

Donasti, Lupe, rus sub urbe, nobis :
 Sed rus est mihi majus in fenestra
 Rus hoc dicere, rus potes vocare !
 In quo ruta facit nemus Dianæ,
 Argutæ tegit ala quod cicadæ,
 Quod formica die comedit uno.
 Clausæ cui folium rosæ corona est ;
 On quo non magis invenitur herba,
 Quam costi folium, piperve crudum ;
 On quo nec cucumis jacere rectus,
 Nec serpens habitare tota possit.
 Erucam male pascit hortus unam,
 Consumpto moritur culex salicto,
 Et talpa est mihi fossor atque arator.
 Non boletus hiare, non mariscæ
 Ridere, aut violæ patere possunt.
 Fines mus populatur, et colono
 Tanquam sus Caledonius timetur ;
 Et sublata volantis ungue Procnæ
 In nido seges est hirundinino
 Et cum stet sine falce, mentulaque,

Non est dimidio locus Priapo
 Vix implet cochlearia peracta messis,
 Et mustum nuce condimus picata.
 Errasti, Lupe, litera sed una :
Nam quo tempore prædium dedisti,
Malleum tu mihi prandum dedisses.

TO LUPUS.

A farm thou gav'st me, joining to the town—
 My window holds one of as much renown.
 This a farm call you? This a farm d'ye say?
 A tuft of rue Diana's grove you may
 As well suppose: for any thing 'twill pass;
 Spice it affords as much as herbs or grass.
 An emmet in one day would eat it bare,
 An earwig starve outright for want of fat;
 In it a violet cannot blow and spread,
 Much less a mushroom raise its spacious head,
 Nor cucumber lie straight upon the ground,
 Or snake conceal itself from being found.
 A single mole both digs and plows the soil,
 A wretched mouse doth all lay waste and spoil,
 And by my hind is apprehended more
 Than Caledonia fear'd the enraged boar:
 All that the yearly harvest does afford,
 A swallow in her little nest may hoard,
 Bear the whole produce in her claw or bill,
 Nor will my vintage a pitch'd nutshell fill.
 Mistaken words thy deed of gift do frame,
 And a mere molehill mounts and meadows name.

ANONYMOUS.

These hyperbolic epigrams, as they may very properly be called, have often a peculiar charm. They ought not, however, to consist of mere hyperbole, like the following :

'Αγρον Μηνοφανης ὀνησατο, και δια λιμον
 'Εκ δρυος ἀλλοτριας ὡτον ἀπτρυχονισεν.
 Γην δ' ἀυτῳ τεθενωτι βαλειν οὐκ εσχον ἀναθεν,
 'Αλλ' ἐταφη μισθι προς τινα των δμορων.
 Ει δ' εγρω τον ἀγρον του Μηνοφανες Επικεφρος,
 Παντα γεμειν ἀγρων εἰκεν ἀν, εκ ἀτομων.

" Menophanes has bought a field, but must hang himself in the next tree from hunger. He possesses not sufficient soil to cover his own corpse, and his burying-place must be purchased out of the neighbouring ground. Had Epicurus seen the field of Menophanes, he would have said that the universe is full of fields instead of atoms."

Now this epigram evidently consists of expectation alone, and instead of a conclusion or solution, we arrive at an extreme. Such like plays of wit may excite laughter, but something more is required for the construction of an epigram. In the Grecian Anthology, hyperbolic epigrams abound, but in Martial very seldom. The latter always proceeds from the hyperbole to an observation, which contains something beyond it. As for instance :

AD PAULUM.

De prætoricia folium mihi, Paule, corona,
 Mittis, et hoc phialæ nomen habere jubes
 Hac fuerat nuper nebula tibi pegma perunctum
 Pallida quam rubri diluit unda croce?
 An magis asturi derasa est ungue ministri
 Bractea de fulcro, quod reor esse; tuo?
 Illa potest culicem longe sentire volantem
 Et minimi penna papilionis agi.
 Exiguæ volitat suspensa vapore lucernæ
 Et leviter fuso rumpitur ista mero.
 Hoc lipitur sputo Jani cariota Calendis,
 Quam fert cum parvo sordidus esse cliens.
 Lenta minus gracili crescunt colocasia filo:
 Plena magis nimio lilia sole cadunt:
 Nec vaga tam tenui discursat aranea tela:
 Tam leve nec bombyx pendulus urget opus.
 Crassior in facie vetulæ stat creta fabullæ:
 Crassior offensæ bulla tumescit aquæ.
 Fortior et tortos servat vesica capillos,
 Et mutat Latias spuma Batava comas.
 Hac cute Ledæo vestitur pullus in ovo:
 Talia lunata splenia fronte sedent.
 Quid tibi cum phiala, ligulam cum mittere posses:
 Mittere cum posses vel cochleare mihi?
 Magna nimis loquimur, cochleam cum mittere posses:
 Denique cum posses mittere, Paule, nihil.

TO PAULUS.

Rapt from the Prætor's crown, a leaf you send,
 To which, fond Paul, a phial's name you lend.

With such a cloud was late thy pageant swell'd,
Which yellow crocus' paly wave dispell'd ?
Or was it pick'd, as I should shrewdly dread,
By slave's sly talon, from thy pompous bed ?
A gnatling's wing gives all its frame to sigh ;
It feels afar the baleful butterfly.
A lampling's steam the flying vase sustains ;
The wine's most light infusion bursts its veins.
Such foil upon his date the client flings
At Janus' calends, when his bribe he brings.
With less fine fibres filmy beans are spun :
Far ampler lillies flag before the sun.
No toils so slim the vagrant web extends :
From work so slight no silken grub depends.
On old Fabulla's face, much thicker dwells
The white ; more dense th' offended bubble swells ;
More strong the film that binds the tortur'd hair ;
More strong the ley that makes the Latian fair.
With skin like this a Leda's chick is clad ;
Such band forbids the spleen-sick to run mad.
Why mock me with your phial, pert buffoon,
When you could send a ladle or a spoon ;
Nay less : could send a snail, or cockle, Paul ;
In fine, when you could—nothing send at all ?

ELPHINSTONE.

All these hyperbolic similes the poet adopts, not for their own sake or pleasantry, but in order to instruct certain great people, who attach considerable obligation to the gift of a trifle bestowed by them. How much better it would be to give nothing at all, it not being generosity but avarice,

or the desire of purchasing a feeling of gratitude with that which deserves it not. But to return : in the same manner as an able versifier will extend the first part of an epigram, in consequence of the ease with which he can do so, an unskilful one will often cut it too short, by including the whole of it in the title, and versifying only the latter part ; and strange to say, some critics have even recommended this mode of construction. These, however, have omitted to consider, that what an epigram thus gains in brevity, it loses in another way, by the heterogeneous nature of its composition. The epigram is by Mr. Kleist :

ON TWO BEAUTIFUL ONE-EYED SISTERS.

Give up one eye, and make your sister's two,
Venus she then would be, and Cupid you.

I do not, for the reason above-mentioned, regard this epigram as equal in beauty to the Latin one of Hieronymus Amaltherus :

Lumine Alcon capto est Lucilla sinistro
Et potis est forma vincere uterque deos
Blande puer, lumen, quod habes concede, puellæ
Sic tu cœcus Amor, sic erit illa Venus.

Sweet boy and girl, with form divine,
And each an eye depriv'd of light :
Gay boy, that lucid orb of thine,
Thy sister give, to set things right :
Two gods we then shall quickly see ;
Thy sister Venus, Cupid thee.

ANONYMOUS.

The latter may spare the title, but the former would not be understood without it ; and thus the fine epigram becomes a mere inscription. I do not recollect a single epigram of Martial which is so defective as to require assistance from the title ; *To*, *From*, and *On*, alone precede his epigrams, with the addition of the party addressed, or of him who forms the subject of them.

All the *Lemmata*, which are to be found in the later editions of Martial, are not original, but belong to the different copyists, and therefore vary in different editions. Every circumstance, even the smallest, which is essential to the full understanding of his epigrams is contained therein, or if any thing therein is not obvious at present, it was so when the poet wrote.

If it be granted that the second part of an epigram, which I have called the solution, ought to correspond with the inscription, which finally clears up our curiosity in regard to the object of an admired monument ; it only remains for us to consider the reasons why such an inscription

should be as short as possible, in order to deduce from it the fact, that brevity is also the first and principal qualification in the solution of an epigram. In respect to monumental inscriptions, the reasons are these : in the first place, monuments are, or ought to be, erected to persons, or events, of considerable renown ; and, moreover, the public places in which they are situated are not constructed for the occupation of a few idle loungers, but for the busy passenger, who has no time to ponder over a long inscription. It is also precisely for readers like these passers by, that epigrams are chiefly constructed ; persons whose engagements will allow only of hasty glances into books. Such readers wish to acquire with expedition, but yet satisfactorily, which cannot be the case if entertained only with common places, or matters entirely unknown to them. A deficiency of brevity in the solution is, however, the fault of few epigrammatists, as it is usually for a selected point that the epigram is constructed. Sometimes, indeed, it happens, that a writer has thought of nothing else ; in which case it usually resembles a picklock, which may be applied to every lock alike.

It is often, in respect to the latter part, or solution of an epigram, that the best poets are most deficient, and this owing to a superabundance

of wit and acuteness. It often happens, that while writing, another solution will occur to them besides that which they originally intended, and this either before they can arrive at the latter, or afterwards, which discovery they are not inclined to allow to remain profitless. A something of this appears to have happened to Martial, in the following epigram :

IN LIGURINUM.

Occurrit tibi nemo quod libenter,
 Qued, quacunque venis, fuga est et ingens
 Circa te, Ligurino, solitudo :
 Quid sit scire cupis? nimis poeta es.

TO LIGURINUS.

That every one, to meet thee, is afraid,
 And where thou com'st a solitude is made :
 Would'st Ligurinus know the reason why?
 Too much a poet, men thy presence fly.

Who can deny that these four lines form a perfect epigram? only, that the words “nimis poeta” appeared to Martial somewhat problematical, and he perceived beyond it another point, which induced him to make the first a mere stage to a further object. He then proceeds :

Hoc valde vitium periculosum est
 Non tigris catulis citata raptis,
 Non dipsas medio perusta sole,
 Nec sic scorpius improbus timetur.

Nam tantos, rogo, quis ferat labores ?
 Et stanti legis, et legis sedenti
 Currenti legis, et legis cacanti.
 In thermas fugio : sonas ad aurem,
 Piscinam peto : non licet natare.
 Ad cœnam propero, tenes euntē
 Ad cœnam venio : fugas sedentem
 Lassus dormio : suscitas jacentem,
 Vis, quantum facies inali, videre ?
 Vir justus, probus, innocens timeris.

TRANSLATION.

And this, I tell thee, is a dang'rous crime,
 A scorpion is not fear'd like ceaseless rhyme,
 An adder, in the scorching sun, fresh sprung,
 A tiger newly robbed of her young.
 For prithee, who such tediousness can bear ?
 Thou read'st to those who sit or standing are :
 E'en Cloacina, has no sacred place,
 Thou wilt intrude with thy unwelcome face.
 The baths too, people cannot wash them there,
 For thee reciting verses in their ear.
 They haste to sup, the goers thou dost stay ;
 Who'd sup with thee, thou readest them away ;
 Weary and sick, they lay them down to sleep,
 Thy verses rouse them, and then waking keep.
 Would'st know what mischief this to thee has bred ?
 Though good, and learn'd, and just, all do thee dread.

Who has a right to complain of a poet, for supplying two points to one epigram, especially, when they suit each other so well as in the given instance, in which the one in no way in-

fringes on the other. It would, however, be very improper to form a rule from these beautiful excrescences, and to decide as Scaliger has done, that an epigram excels when it consists of many smaller epigrams. However, his own instance of an "*Epigrammata differto*," by no means proves it to be the best, for although it contains four more, they are by no means better than they should be. It is on a gouty patient, for whom the starving system of cure is prescribed :

Heus utrum eligimus ? Si non nisi dente podagra
Dente famis diræ discruciatæ perit
Ah nequeam, nisi sic, finire, dolore doloram ?
Atque ferum finem, tollere fine truci
Heu macie informi, larvata heu, tabe furorem
Et funus plus quam funere præveniens
O vitam invitam ; O incommoda commoda : lux nox !
Si, ne aliquid fias, cogeris esse nihil.*

It is astonishing how blind the most learned men may become when led to deduce any thing from their own example. This epigram which is to contain four epigrams, scarcely amounts to one. Its vapid

* This cannot be translated with a preservation of the original pun and equivoque, and consequently no translation is supplied.

solution is swelled out by each additional line like a swoln out bladder, which at last explodes, and produces wind alone.

Mr. Wernich is more explicit in the construction of these compressed epigrams. In theory he entirely agrees with Scaliger, for he defines epigram to be a composition in which the reader has to pause on each line until imperceptibly led to the conclusion; a definition which omits the unity which is necessary to every epigram.

Again: if the two parts of an epigram have to coincide with the monument and its inscription, then the proportion which exists between the two latter must also be found in the two former; which amounts to this, that in beholding the monument we may at least be enabled to guess at the tenour of the inscription. Thus a monument, the appearance of which excites a sentiment of melancholy, will not be expected to contain a comic inscription, and *vice versa*. In the same manner, that part of the epigram which tends to excite expectation, ought to lead us to anticipate the tenour of the solution; so that we may not be surprised and offended by a disagreeable contrast. I do not, however, include in this observation every unexpected transition from great to small, or black to white, which may occasionally be agreeable, and excite to laughter, if our feelings are not

wounded by such contrast. As, for instance, the following by Scarron :

Superbes monumens de l'orgueil des humains !
 Pyramides, tombeaux dont la vaine structure
 A témoigné que l'art, par l'adresse des mains,
 Et l'assidu travail, put vaincre la Nature !
 Vieux palais ruinés, chef-d'œuvres des Romains,
 Et les derniers efforts de leur architecture,
 Colisée, où souvent ces peuples inhumains,
 De s'entr'assassiner se donnoient tablature !
 Par l'injure des ans vous êtes abolis
 Ou du moins la plûpart vous êtes démolis !
 Il n'est point de ciment que le tems ne dissoude.
 Si vos marbres si durs ont senti son pouvoir,
 Dois-je trouve mauvais qu'un méchant pourpoint noir,
 Qui m'a duré deux ans, soit percé par le coude ?

TRANSLATION.

Ye monuments superb of human pride ;
 Ye towering pyramids by Nilus' side !
 Ye tombs immense, like mountains on the plain,
 That make encroachments upon nature's reign !
 Ye ruined palaces ! ye temples hoar !
 Where heroes dwelt, or bow'd down to adore.
 In mighty Rome, magnificent and dread,
 Where Architecture rais'd her marble head !
 And thou, vast pile, that Architecture's boast,
 Whose walls extensive might enclose a host ;
 Gigantic Coliseum ! where of old,
 The Roman stern beheld the conflict bold,
 Of gladiators drench'd in human blood ;
 Who to the death in barbarous manhood stood !

Ye, for most part, have felt the touch of time;
Mould'ring your architraves, and fronts sublime;
Levelling your beauteous shafts, and marble domes,
Mid falling temples and decadent tombs !
No cement can resist Saturnus' power,
Offspring of Time is all, and all he does devour.
If then your during stone and marble pass
Away, as from the mead the waving grass,
Ought I to murmur that my old black coat
Is out at elbows and not worth a groat ?

It is now time to consider, under a general point of view, those epigrams in which our expectation is rather amused, and agreeably deceived, than satisfied.

Some readers will still look for the most efficient part of that which is to be said concerning epigram. Hitherto it has been defined a small witty poem only, without allusion to the sources of its wit. I have made the entire beauty and strength of an epigram to consist in first *exciting* and then *satisfying* expectation, without adverting to the manner in which such satisfaction is to be obtained. What the Romans call *acumina*, and the French *pointes*, I have neither insisted upon nor rejected.

If by acumen or point nothing more be intended than the thought for which expectation is excited, then it is evident that no epigram can

exist without it, and that it forms the true criterion of an epigram; but if by those words be meant only the mere play of wit produced by a certain arrangement of words, the question is, whether such point be necessary—or what amounts to the same thing—whether a debt may be paid in adulterate coin when the genuine is not forthcoming. In the same manner, as a deficiency of sterling coin leads to the production of a base metal, so will a paucity of genuine wit and spirit lead to a substitution of something which may resemble them; the receivers of which substitutes may be deemed fortunate if the resemblance be striking, and the intrinsic value not too much deteriorated.

To such coins, which are neither altogether good nor valueless, I will venture to compare two sorts of epigrams; which, although not perfect, have always found admirers among people of taste. By the one I mean those which deceive us in regard to the expectations excited; and by the other, those which are defective or ambiguous in reference to the solution. I will add a word or two on each.

Every thing new surprises merely because it is so; and although it is not pleasant, in consequence of its surprising only, yet it is evident that the simple surprise is in itself agreeable. If,

therefore, it is not in the power of the poet to surprise us with something altogether new in the solution of his epigram, who can blame him if he endeavours to give a common one a turn which will startle us. This, however, can be effected only by deception ; because the poet cannot give the reader that which he anticipates, he strives to prevent him looking for that which is to follow. He appears, for instance, to be anxious to praise, and ends in blaming ; and so on, satisfied if the reader only miss his object. One example of this from Martial :

IN SANCTRAM.

Nihil est miserius, nec gulosius Sanctra
 Rictam vocatus cum cucurrit ad cœnam,
 Quam tot diebus noctibusque captavit :
 Ter poscit apri glandulas, quater lumbum,
 Et utramque coxam leporis, et duos armos :
 Nec erubescit pejeraræ de turdo,
 Et ostreorum rapere lividos cirros,
 Buccis placentæ sordidam linit mappam
 Illic et uvæ collocantur ollares
 Et punicorum pauca grana malorum
 Et excavatæ pellis indecens vulvæ
 Et lippa sicus, debilisque boletus,
 Sed mappa cum jam mille rumpitur furtis,
 Rosos tepenti spondylos in sinu condit
 Et devorato capite turturem truncum,
 Colligere longa turpe nec putat dextra

Analecta quicquid et canes relinquerunt
 Nec esculenta sufficit gulæ præda,
 Misto lagenam replet ad pedes vino.
 Hæc per ducentas cum domum tulit sealas,
 Seque obserata elusit anxius cella,
 Gulosus ille postero die—vendit.

TO SANCTRA.

When Sanctra long had rul'd in dreams,
 And fed his waking mind with future steams ;
 To the still panted, pray'd, pursu'd, repast,
 Him the dear invitation blest at last.
 But oh ! poor Sanctra, wast thou blest or curst,
 When on the gorgeous board thine eyeballs burst ?

The kernels of the boar he thrice demands :
 The loin he four times hints he understands.
 To the hare's either hip his spirit springs ;
 And flutters now to fly on both the wings.
 His soul he perjures for a glorious thrush ;
 He beards the oysters ; but he will not crush.
 With comfits next, behold his napkin grac'd :
 In the same hoard, the potted grapes are plac'd.
 Here a few grains of punic apples lie ;
 And there a skin, just scoop'd from out a sty.
 Nor is the blear-ey'd fig herself forgot ;
 Nor here forgets the mushroom mash'd to rot.
 When the stretch'd cloth, by many a hundred rents,
 Bewrays a thousand thefts, a thousand scents :
 The half-gnaw'd bones he fosters in his breast,
 Where not the headless dove disdains to rest.
 Nor does his dext'rous hand abhor the theft,
 Of the last offals which the dogs have left.

But lo ! he fills, suffic'd not thus to eat,
With mingled wine, the flaggon at his feet.
When all ten score of stairs he home has rais'd ;
And every power, that lent him power, has prais'd.
His treasure he unlocks ; and strange to tell,
Next morn he condescends—the whole to *sell*.

ELPHINSTONE.

Until the last word of this epigram we are led to expect something quite different from that which we arrive at. We are first induced to regard Sanctra as an epicure, but at length discover that he only collects all these delicacies, in order to sell them, in order to procure the more essential requisites of life. The frequent use made of this mode of surprise it is unnecessary to mention ; but it is thus recommended by Cicero. (Vide *de Oratore*, lib. 2. c. 63.) *Scites esse notissimum ridiculi genus, cum aliquid expectamus aliud dicitur. Hic nobis metipsis noster error risum movet.* Cicero adds, *Quod si admixtum est etiam ambiguum, fit falsius.* This would form the second sort of epigram, to which I above alluded ; for it is the necessary condition of an equivoque, or ambiguity, that it should be unexpected. It is unnecessary to define an equivoque, I will therefore only add that it should not be carried so far as to render the risible tendency forced and languid. The equivoque is not to excite laughter for the mere risu-

diducere rictum, but may often form the soul of the finest mirth, and add grace to energy. Ex ambigua dicta, Cicero also observes, *vel argutissima putantur, sed non semper in joco; sæpe in etiam in gravitate versantur.* If the equivoque be something more than a mere play of words, then it has a double sense, the one of which is true in itself; and the other, although false, serves to lead to or confirm it; but I need dwell no longer on a subject on which so much has been said already.

I shall therefore here finish these general observations on epigram, and having once quoted Cicero, I cannot do better than conclude with a passage from that great Roman authority, which may be addressed to those readers who deem all investigation into the principles which govern works of wit to be useless. *Ego in his preceptis hanc vim et hanc utilitatem esse arbitror, non ut ad reperiendum, quid dicamus, arte ducamus, sed ut ea, quæ natura, quæ studio, quæ exercitatione, consequimur aut recta esse confidamus, aut prava intelligamus, cum quo referenda sint, didicerimus.* (De Oratore, lib. 2. cap. 57.

FINIS.